

## MEMORANDUM

June 7, 2019

To: President Kimberly Cassidy

From: The Telling Bryn Mawr Histories Work Group; Ignacio Gallup-Diaz (Chair), Sharon Ullman, Monique Scott, Stephen Vider, Ruth Lindeborg, Jesse Gale, Eric Pumroy, Camilla MacKay, Kristin Weaver, Amirah Hewitt, Bria Montaque, Laney Myers, Arpita Joyce, Talia Shiroma, and Clara Zhang

Re: Recommendations

The charge empaneling the Telling Bryn Mawr Histories Group directed us to develop a proposal for a public display that recognizes the ways in which M. Carey Thomas's commitment to women's education was informed by racism; recommend ways for the College to better represent the diversity of those who have shaped Bryn Mawr's histories; identify an initial set of projects to document, share, and preserve histories; and confer with the Infrastructure Group to inform their work and identify tools and technologies to support projects of history recovery.

The Group has developed the following recommendations in order to foster and sustain the College's engagement with the people, places, and things that comprise its past. Our recommendations share a single, common thread: they represent either new structures – or refinements to existing ones – that will facilitate the community's continued engagement with its complex history.

The recommendations are organized into three sections. The first comprises actions that, when implemented, will have an immediate effect and presence on campus. The second constitutes a group of multi-step processes that will require attention and care to bring to fruition. The third group covers proposals that will involve a longer or more sustained level of planning in order to have a deep impact and leave an enduring presence on the College's campus.

### ***A. Plans for Immediate Action***

#### *1. Establish a Histories Standing Committee (to be Chaired by a Permanent Staff Person)*

The two Groups empaneled by President Cassidy – the Telling Bryn Mawr History Group and the Infrastructure Group – have worked throughout the 2018-19 academic year and will cease to exist after the President responds to their recommendations.

Therefore, we propose the establishment in Academic Year 2019-20 of a permanent body of faculty, staff, and students that we term the *Standing Committee*. Its purpose is not to replace either of the two reporting Groups, but, rather, it represents an entirely new entity whose purpose

will be to coordinate and oversee the processes and projects related to the research in and preservation of the College's history that are recommended in the Groups' reports.

Since the recommendations encompass administrative as well as curricular innovations, we envision the *Standing Committee*, whose charge will be to advise President Cassidy, acting to coordinate with groups across the institution in order to assist in the process of carrying forward the research in and preservation of the College's history.

The Group recommends the hiring of a new staff person to serve as the coordinator of the projects and processes entrusted to the *Standing Committee*.

The *Standing Committee* will be involved in the hiring of the new coordinator; in the interim, it will serve as the coordinating body of the Groups' recommendations.

The Group also recommends that the *Standing Committee* and the convener of history projects have the ability to call upon administrators and staff from across the College's offices (beyond those who might be serving as members of the Committee) in order to communicate with administrators and staff so that the recommendations made by the Groups might be systematized and implemented. (The offices of Communications, LITS, Alumnae Affairs, Development, and Facilities will prove especially important in coordinating and publicizing the changes recommended by the Groups.)

The Appendix includes a list of suggested research topics that students and community-members might undertake, and, in addition to supporting and advising these projects, we recommend that the *Standing Committee* structure a series of events and workshops throughout the academic year that will allow students to present the fruits of their research to the community. The purpose of these events is twofold: to help people learn about the range of work the Committee is coordinating, while also providing outlets for expression and reactions from the community.

## 2. *The alcove-space in Old Library reframed as a contemplation-area.*

The Group recommends that the alcove-space under the main stairs in the Old Library be marked as a place for members of the community to reflect upon and contemplate the College's multivalent and complex history.

The Interactive Multimedia Screens will be housed here. (A fuller description of the screens appears below in Section C.)

### *Actions:*

- The vending machines presently under the stairs should be removed to an alternate location.
- A small bench and table put in their place.
- A permanent suggestion box placed here, the contents of which will be reviewed monthly by the coordinator.

This arrangement will also allow visitors to sit, think, talk together, and write there.

The content included in the poster unveiled in March 2019 in the alcove-space will be displayed permanently, to be accompanied by supplemental displays of signs/information.

*3. Establish a process to house, label, and contextualize images/busts/likenesses of M. Carey Thomas*

We recommend that the Standing Committee, in conjunction with members of the Special Collections department, develop, solicit, and review plans-for-display of these items. We acknowledge that final decisions about display will also be informed by conservation and insurance considerations.

Kristin Weaver, a member of both Groups, has developed a plan that she intends to submit to the Committee. The plan recommends a systematic rotating display of photographs, documents, and art-work, and historically-significant furniture in the public spaces in Old Library, including the Great Hall, Canaday Library, the Campus Center, Old Library, Taylor Hall, and the dormitories. (The furniture listed above would include items from the Deanery and other large pieces collected by Thomas and currently in storage.)

*4. Integrate presentation of historical pages/material in the BMC Web Presence*

The College's web pages and repositories comprise the face that we present to the electronic world. The pages deliver information to visitors, aggregate it, and, through linking, establish a nexus of valuable material.

We recommend that the College create a coordinated plan to link pages and collections that relate to the College's history in thematic ways and that going forward attention be given to linking new pages and new material.

The pages supporting the 'Black at Bryn Mawr' tours, and any which contain research underpinning the tours, should be contain markers, design elements, or or 'sigils' that make clear to viewers that they inhabit the same visual and thematic universe as the College's other pages.

While we are not suggesting that all these pages should look the same, we *are* recommending that we establish a central "landing page" (such as the one created for [Global Bryn Mawr](#)) that speaks to the process of re-viewing institutional pasts and that provides links to the growing number of digital history projects that will be created over the coming years as described herein, as well as existing projects such as Black at Bryn Mawr.

The multimedia screens will be permanently on view in the Old Library and will highlight a rotating body of content about the College's history, students, faculty, and workers. This content should be simultaneously accessible online, forming part of the College's web presence.

Kristin Weaver has developed a set of connected projects that would use social media in order to gather information from students and members of the community; she plans to submit them to the Standing Committee. For example, she envisions a Telling Current Histories Instagram project that will use the platform to engage students as the campus navigates these changes, and will serve as a space to tell their own current histories as they are experiencing them — a way to show how their own stories intertwine with those of the College’s extended past. The Appendix includes a description of the kinds of events the Committee might undertake in addition to its social media presence in order to foster the community’s engagement in its history.

#### *5. Display of student work produced in Museum Studies and Public History courses.*

Several recently- and presently-being-taught courses engage students in research projects connected to the history of the College. The students have produced final projects comprising multimedia presentations.

The instructors of these courses can recommend that selected projects be displayed in Canaday Library in windows/boxes curated by Special Collections.

The students in Stephen Vider's Public History course (History 245, Topics in Modern US History) this Spring prepared draft exhibitions that engaged with different voices in Bryn Mawr's past; we recommend that the College fund a similar course to be taught next Spring, resulting in a large physical and virtual exhibition for the Fall of 2020.

### ***B. Administrative and Curricular Innovations***

In order to foster and sustain a fully contextualized engagement with the College’s past, students need support, in the form of advising, course-structures, and funding to provide credit or pay for their research work; advisors need direction, support structures, and a balanced job description; the College needs to foster links between administrative units so that the mission – to examine our past, ‘display’ it to ourselves and the world, and to make visible the hidden, forgotten, or marginalized actors in Bryn Mawr’s past – can be sustained for the foreseeable future.

In recommending several mechanisms to support and encourage students to research a wide range of topics connected to the College’s past, it can be assumed that the research might lead to additional situations in which the College will need to contend with how to address the real possibility that other figures important to the College’s past might be problematic. The Standing Committee could serve this function, establishing its presence as an entity to evaluate information, bring issues to the attention of the President, and make recommendations without the necessity of impaneling an ad-hoc working group.

#### *1. Embed BMC Histories Throughout Curriculum*

(a) *ESem: An Existing Structure thru which BMC Histories Can Be Embedded in the Curriculum.*

In the past, faculty have taught courses on the College's history both as intermediate history courses (e.g. Elliot Shore's History of Bryn Mawr) and as ESems (e.g. Alicia Walker's course on college architecture). An ESem that uses the College's history as a central "text" offers an opportunity for faculty from varied disciplinary backgrounds (e.g. History, Art History, Sociology, English) to engage students in Bryn Mawr's past.

(b) *Praxis: An Existing Workable Structure to Support Research.*

Over the past several years, the College has created a new form of Praxis III Fieldwork Seminars, in which a single faculty advisor mentors several Praxis III projects on related issues and meets with students once a week to discuss related readings or student projects. This structure would allow several projects to go forward in any given semester and create a cohort of fellow researchers, while managing demand on faculty time. An exemplar in this regard: Stephen Vider's History 245 (Topics in Modern US History), which focused upon the College's history.

2. Innovation: *Support for Work-Study Projects*

3. Innovation: *Funded Student Fellowships*

*Estimated costs:*

- The hire of a new staff convenor of history projects would require an endowment of at least \$1million
- Support for work-study projects — 2 students
- (Summer) Fellowships: \$8,000 per annum
- Praxis faculty support: \$8,000 per annum

Given the scale of these costs, we recommend that the College undertake fundraising earmarked to support the curricular recommendations.

### ***C. Campus Transformations***

#### *1. Screens*

We recommend that the College create/support two multimedia screens to be installed where the bulletin boards are presently in the alcove-space under the main stairs of Old Library.

The screens will serve the same purpose as the areas throughout campus marked for image/document displays – a frequently updated set of images, documents, and text providing information about the College's history.

However, they will be much more — they occupy a central role in the process of transforming the alcove-space from a well-trafficked passageway into a place where members of the community can expect to stop and regularly receive and share ideas and information.

Naming this part of the building will be important in establishing it as a place where members of the community will be encouraged to think, reflect, interact, and engage with each other.

While the space has been called *the alcove* here, the College might consider naming the space after a staff member or administrator of color, and using the name consistently as people's attention is directed to content, displays, and events that appear and take place there.

Following these same lines, the Group also recommends that the Standing Committee investigate other spaces and rooms throughout the College that might be named and marked in order to elevate and amplify the experiences of staff who have contributed to the life of the College.

The list of research topics included as an Appendix could provide a continuing source of content for the screens.

Target date: *Spring 2020*

*Estimated initial costs: Initial design/build -- \$45,000; annual maintenance staffing TBD.*

## *2. Conference: MCT/Women's Higher Ed: Past, Present, and Future*

A conference bringing together an international group of scholars to present/share scholarship on Women's Higher Education.

The following topics could center the event:

- Women's educational reform after the Civil War
- Women's experiences at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Spelman, Bennett, Tillotson, and Barber-Scotia Colleges), and Black advocates for women's education such as Mary McCleod Bethune, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Anna Julia Cooper, and Lucy Diggs Slowe.
- The Policies and Politics of Exclusion
- Trans Students at Women's Colleges
- Health/Wellness
- Changing Attitudes Towards Students with Disabilities

A Conference Committee will provide a fuller description of the Conference; draw up the event's budget; devise a call for papers; choose a keynote speaker and create a list of scholars who should be invited to attend and present their work; and arrange for publication of a conference volume, preferably online and open-access, as part of the College's histories web presence.

A working estimate for a multi-day conference is that it will cost \$50,000.

Target date: *Spring 2021*

### 3. Memorial

Christopher Alexander's books on architecture, building, and towns provide insights through which we might conceive of the Old Library as a 'wounded building,' and underscore our commitment to 'heal' and transform the space.

In *The Timeless Way of Building* (Oxford UP, 1979), Alexander writes that “a building ... is given its character, essentially, by those events which keep on happening there most often.” (66) “[E]ach ... building has a particular set of ... patterns of events according to its prevailing culture.” (68) “This does not mean that space creates events, or that it causes them.” (72) “It simply means that a pattern of events cannot be separated from the space where it occurs.” (73) “The life which happens in a building ... is not merely anchored in the space but made up from the space itself.” (74)

In *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction* (Oxford UP, 1977), Alexander writes that “people understand their surroundings and orient themselves ... by making mental maps. Such a map needs a point of reference: some point ... which is very obvious ... that it is possible to refer to all other paths and buildings to it. ... From the point of view of the group of users -- the workers or the inhabitants -- the sense of community and connection is heightened when one building or part of one building is singled out and treated as a main building, common to all, the heart of the institution.”

While Alexander's view that a campus might have a *single* heart might be too restrictive -- social work students, scientists, and workers might have different mental maps of campus with different (or overlapping) centers -- there's some truth in what/how he writes.

A memorial marker in the area of the path leading into the Old Library comprises the most notable and permanent alteration to the campus, and holds the promise to be a point of re-orientation and re-invigoration for the campus. It has the potential to re-orient the spaces and paths leading to Old Library, and the connecting points between Taylor, Canaday Library and Old Library.

The memorial will by necessity be a marker of absences, representing those excluded from membership in the College community.

Exemplars: The Women's Table at Yale, designed by Maya Lin; University of North Georgia has a memorial garden, with remembrance spaces devoted to faculty, administrators, students, and staff.

We recommend that the Standing Committee be charged with the task of establishing a budget, identifying a design process, and setting forth a community engagement plan to inform the creation of a memorial, including a Request for Proposals by Spring 2021.

Questions to be addressed:

– What budget will be available?

- How do we develop a design process?
- How and when do we engage the community in this process?

Target date of completion: Request for Proposals in place by *Spring 2021*, to coincide with the Conference; final completion TBD.



## *Appendix*

### I. *Research topics which students might engage via ESems, Praxis Courses, work-study, or fellowships:*

Census of Images, Paintings, Sculpture  
History of Student Activism – 30s/60s/90s/Present  
History of Perry House  
The Enid Cook Center  
Examination of BMC Yearbooks  
Examination of the BMC collection of Digitized Images  
Examination of the BMC *Alumnae Record*  
Serving People/Working People  
The ‘Interior Geographies’ of the Campus’ Buildings

## II. Outreach Events

### 1. *Mini Pop-Ups*

The Committee could engage the community through staging a variety of events and workshops that might take the form of: reflection prompts for community members to answer with markers on large easels in the CC (e.g. What do you think of when you see the words “Bryn Mawr” & “legacy” together?), a community mural to be painted on the Old Library bannisters, or group crafting workshops (e.g. quilting patches to express individual histories)—the opportunities are endless. The purpose of these events is twofold: to help people learn about what we’re working towards while also providing outlets for expression.

### 2. *Importance of These Events*

These projects will put into practice the College’s stated willingness to engage in a practice of embracing all aspects of its past and legacy – instantiating the opposite of a culture of silence that can take hold within institutions of higher education.

Regularly structuring these opportunities will encourage open dialogue about difficult topics, and establishing open channels of communication with members of the community -- whether in person or with social media -- is a crucial component in the project of re-establishing some of the trust that was lost as a result of the problematic aspects of the institution’s past.